Another City for Another Life

The crisis in urbanism is worsening. The layout of neighborhoods, old and new, conflicts with established patterns of behavior and even more with the new ways of life that we are seeking. The result is a dismal and sterile ambience in our surroundings.

In the older neighborhoods, the streets have degenerated into freeways and leisure activities are being commercialized and corrupted by tourism. Social relations become impossible. The newly built neighborhoods have only two all-pervasive themes: automobile traffic and household comfort—an impoverished expression of bourgeois contentment, lacking any sense of play.

To meet the need to rapidly construct entire cities, cemeteries of reinforced concrete are being built in which masses of the population are condemned to die of boredom. What is the point of all the extraordinary technical inventions the world now has at its disposal if the conditions are lacking to derive any benefit from them, if they contribute nothing to leisure, if imagination is absent?

We demand adventure. Not finding it on earth, some want to seek it on the moon. We, however, are committed to changing life here on earth. We intend to create situations, new situations, breaking the laws that prevent the development of meaningful ventures in life and culture. We are at the dawn of a new era, and we are already attempting to sketch out the image of a happier life, of a unitary urbanism—an urbanism designed for pleasure.

Our domain is thus the urban network, the natural expression of a collective creativity, capable of incorporating the creative energies liberated by the decline of a culture based on individualism. In our opinion the traditional arts will have no role in the creation of the new environment in which we want to live.

We are in the process of inventing new techniques; we are examining the possibilities offered by existing cities; and we are making models and plans for future cities. We know that we need to avail ourselves of all the new technological inventions, and we know that the future constructions we envisage will have to be flexible enough to respond to a dynamic conception of life, which means creating our own surroundings in direct relation to continually changing modes of behavior.

We thus have a social conception of urbanism. We are opposed to the notion of a garden city in which the spacing apart of isolated sky-
scrapers inevitably reduces people's direct relations and collective activities. To create a close connection between surroundings and behavior, urban concentration is indispensable. Those who think that telecommunications and rapid transportation are going to break up the shared life of the conurbations have little understanding of humanity's true needs. In contrast to the garden city idea favored by most modern architects, we envisage covered cities in which the layout of roads and separate buildings will be replaced by a continuous spatial construction elevated above the ground, including clusters of dwellings as well as public spaces (permitting changes in use according to the needs of the moment). Since all traffic, in the functional sense of the term, will pass on the ground level below or on overhead terraces, streets can be eliminated. The multitude of different traversable spaces of which the city is composed will form a complex and vast social space. Far from a return to nature—from the notion of living in a park, as solitary aristocrats once did—we see in such immense constructions the possibility of overcoming nature and of regulating the climate, light and sounds in these different spaces in accordance with our desires.

Do we intend this to be a new functionalism, which would promote an even greater idealization of utilitarian life? It should not be forgotten that once functions are established, they are followed by play. For a long time now, architecture has become a game of space and ambiances. Garden cities lack ambiances. We, on the contrary, want to make more conscious use of ambiances so that they correspond to all our needs.

The future cities we envisage will offer a wholly new variability of sensations in this realm, and unforeseen games will become possible through the inventive use of material conditions, such as modifications of air, sound and light. City planners are already studying the possibility of harmonizing the cacophony that reigns in present-day cities. This problem will soon give rise to a new field of creation, as will many other such problems that will present themselves. Space travel, which seems likely in the near future, might also influence this development, since establishing bases on other planets will immediately raise the problem of sheltered cities, which may provide models for our study of future urbanism.

Above all, however, the reduction in the work necessary for production (resulting from extensive automation) will create a need for leisure, a diversity of behavior, and a change in the very nature of human behavior that will inevitably lead to a new conception of a collective habitat with a maximum of social space, in contrast to the
garden city where social space is reduced to a minimum. The city of the future must be conceived as a continuous construction on pillars, or as an extended system of different structures from which are suspended premises for housing, recreation, production, distribution, etc., leaving the ground level free for traffic circulation and public meetings. The use of ultralightweight and insulating materials that are currently being tested will permit light construction with supports spaced well apart. In this way it will be possible to create a multilayered city: underground, ground level, upper stories and terraces, with areas ranging from that of a present-day neighborhood to that of a metropolis. It should be noted that in such a city the built-up surface will be 100% and the free surface 200% (ground level plus terraces), whereas in traditional cities the figures are approximately 80% and 20%, and even a garden city can at most reverse this latter proportion. The terraces, forming an outdoor terrain that extends over the whole surface of the city, can be used as sports fields, as landing pads for airplanes and helicopters, and for vegetation. They will be accessible everywhere by stairways and elevators. The different floors will be divided into adjoining, communicating and climate-controlled spaces, making it possible to create an infinite variety of ambiances and facilitating the wanderings of the inhabitants and their frequent chance encounters. The ambiances will be regularly and consciously changed, using all technical means, by teams of specialized creators, who will thus be professional situationists.

An in-depth study of the means of creating ambiances, and of the latter's psychological influence, is one of the tasks we are currently undertaking. Studies concerning the technical implementation of the load-bearing structures as well as their aesthetic aspects are the specific task of visual artists and engineers. The contribution of the latter, in particular, is urgently needed for the preparatory work we are undertaking.

If the project we have roughly outlined here risks being taken for a fantastic dream, we insist on the fact that it is feasible from the technical standpoint, desirable from the human standpoint, and indispensable from the social standpoint. The increasing dissatisfaction of the whole of humanity will reach a point where we will all be compelled to execute projects for which we possess the means, projects that will contribute to the realization of a richer and more fulfilled life.